

HOW TO CONDUCT FAMILY WORSHIP

BY

HAROLD McA. ROBINSON

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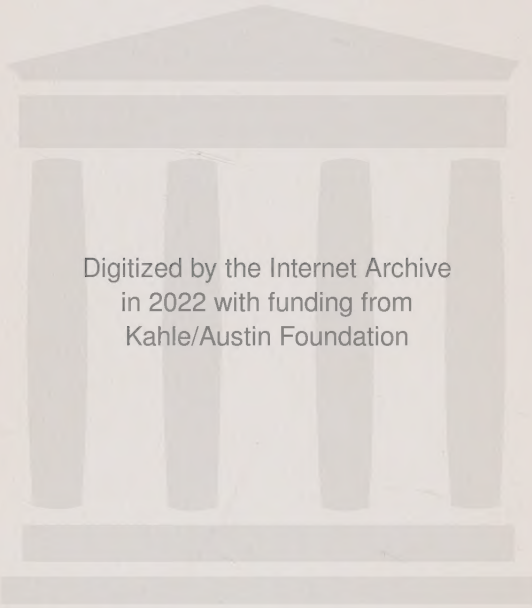
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HAROLD McA. ROBINSON



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FOREWORD

If this little book helps one family to worship God as a family, I shall be more than content. For heredity, environment, and education all combine to cast the light or the shadow of a family down the succeeding generations. There is no more priceless possession than a godly heritage, and there is no greater service that a family can render to God than the transmission of that heritage to the next generation. Family worship of the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the life of a Christian family.

H. McA. R.

CHAPTER I

WHY WORSHIP GOD BY FAMILIES?

What is worship?

Dr. Richard S. Storrs once wrote, "In church, cottage, college, camp, on sea or land, around the world, wherever is adoring affection and trust toward Him on high, expressed by the aspiring spirit, there is true worship." This description of worship will help us to understand what Christian worship is.

There are two parties to Christian worship: first, the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, toward whom the worship is directed; and second, the person or persons who aspire toward God, directing their worship toward him as its object.

Worship may be either personal and private—one person aspiring toward God. Or worship may be social and public—a group or company of persons, for example, a family or a congregation, together aspiring toward God.

Again, worship may be a feeling of "adoring affection and trust toward Him on high," or it may be an act or acts through which that feeling finds expression, or it may be both the feeling and the act or acts through which the feeling is expressed. Every motion of the solitary person toward God—an aspiration, an adoring thought, a feeling of trustful affection—is worship, though it may find expression in no other act. It is also worship when we obey our Lord's command, "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thine inner chamber. and having shut thy door, pray to thy Father who

is in secret," expressing our adoration, love, and trust toward God in the act of secret prayer. It is true worship, though it is now social and no longer private, when a group or company of persons express together in appropriate acts their common feelings of adoring affection and trust toward God.

The acts of worship through which Christians usually express their feelings of worship are: the use of Scripture, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, prayer, sacred music, and the bringing of offerings.

The place of worship in the Christian religion.

Worship is the very heart and soul of religion. Religion, and in particular the Christian religion, is communion between the person who adores, loves, and trusts the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the God and Father whom he worships. The Christian religion can no more exist without this personal communion between Christians and the living and true God than human friendship can exist without the fellowship of friend with friend. This personal relationship of Christians with God, through Jesus Christ, expressed in worship is the root and main-spring of all Christian service. Of all religious duties and privileges, then, the duty and privilege of worship is the most vital, the highest, and the best.

Why worship by families?

Worship must be both private and social. Our Lord not only commanded us to pray "in secret," but he also commanded us to pray after this manner, "Our Father which art in heaven." In the very form of address to God in The Lord's prayer, the social nature

of prayer is recognized. What is true of prayer is true of all the acts of worship. We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. We are social beings. We are born into social relationships, and we live in ever-widening and deepening social relationships.

No function of our lives can be merely secret and private. Every function of our lives must become in one way or another public and social. Christians must worship with other people, that is, they must worship socially, in groups and companies. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking our own assembling together." If Christian worship by social groups or companies is necessary, then Christian worship by families is necessary.

There are at least four reasons for family worship:

1. The family is the smallest, the most compact, and the most intimate social group. "God setteth the solitary in families." The family has a life of its own if any social group has. If there is to be any social worship of God, if persons are to express their adoration, love, and trust toward God by social groups, then it is most natural and necessary that they should do so by families. A Christian family life that does not express itself in family worship is a contradiction in terms. If one cannot be a Christian without having a feeling of "adoring affection and trust toward Him on high," expressed in acts of worship, how can a family group be Christian with no common worship? Family worship is a source, as it is the consummation, of family unity.

2. A family exists for the nurture of children. The chief responsibility and the chief joy of the Christian family is the Christian nurture of its children. How

can this Christian nurture proceed if it does not have in it the essential element of worship? Certainly there can be no Christian nurture in the family if the children are not provided both an opportunity to worship God with the family and a training in the meaning and use of those acts through which the feelings of adoration, love, and trust toward God most naturally express themselves. Family worship has, then, an indispensable place in the program of Christian nurture in the family: first, because it provides an opportunity for the children to worship God with the family; second, because it furnishes the means for the training and development of the children in the use and enjoyment of worship.

3. Family worship as a source, and as the consummation, of a Christian family life tends to perpetuate itself. A godly heritage is precious not only in itself but also because it perpetuates itself through many generations. When a young man and a young woman set up a home of their own, it is almost inevitably after the blended patterns of the homes from which they come. Heredity, environment, and education alike combine to produce this continuity of family life. A Christian family life, with family worship at its heart, will reproduce itself in Christian families to many generations. A Christian family can make no greater contribution to the Kingdom of God than this casting of its light down the generations of men.

4. Life in the family is a preparation and a training for life in the larger social groups. The virtues which the children learn in the Christian family are the virtues which when practiced in the larger social groups will further the Kingdom of God. The social worship of God to which the children may become accustomed

in the Christian family will lead them into larger fellowships of worship, such as the Church, the whole company of believers, and will enable them to share in that ministry of worship which is the inspiration of all Christian service.

CHAPTER II

THE ACTS AND METHODS OF FAMILY WORSHIP

What are the acts of family worship?

The acts of worship most appropriate to the family are the use of Scripture, prayer, and song. There are other acts of social worship, such as the sacraments and the bringing of offerings, which are not appropriate to the family. There are also other acts of worship which may be appropriate to the family, but these three acts are the most common and the most appropriate.

What are the principles which ought to control family worship?

There are many ways in which these acts of worship may be adapted to the use of the family. If the family consists of adults, these adaptations in the use of the materials of worship will be easy and natural. But when there are children in the family, care must be taken that the worship is really a family worship, that is, such as offers an opportunity for the children to express to God the adoration, love, and trust which rise out of their own growing needs and capacities. The family worship must not be merely a grown folks' worship

under which the early aspirations of the children are crushed.

There are four general principles which ought to be observed in the worship of families where there are young children:

1. The worship program ought to be brief. The attention of children, particularly young children, cannot be held for any length of time. There may be some disciplinary value in making children sit through family prayers after their capacity of interest has been exhausted, but the dulling of the children's sense of the meaning of worship outweighs this questionable disciplinary value. Ten minutes is about the limit for family worship where there are young children.

2. The worship program ought to be varied. Variations which provide fresh and interesting ways of expressing the family adoration, love, and trust toward God will make the exercise more vital to the children. A hard routine will be detrimental to the spirit of the family worship.

3. The worship program ought to be social. The fact that we are considering the worship of a family must never be lost from view. There must be opportunity for every member of the family actively to engage in the worship.

4. The worship program ought to be adapted to the needs and capacities of the youngest. While there must be elements in the family worship which express the adoration, love, and trust of each member of the family, it is most necessary that the needs of the younger members be kept clearly in view, and the worship program be graded to meet those needs. Christian worship is peculiarly capable of this adaptation.

Its spirit is essentially a spirit of childlike trust. "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

At what time should family worship be held?

The most common excuse for not having family worship is the lack of time. Our modern life is so crowded and hurried that there is scarcely time for a family to live together, much less worship together. Against this excuse there are two facts to be urged: First, family worship does not take so much time as some people seem to suppose. From six to ten minutes will cover the usual program for family worship, with perhaps some extension of time on Sundays or special days such as holidays, birthdays, and other family anniversaries. Second, if family worship is vital to the family life, time can be found for it. As Weigle and Tweedy write in their "Training the Devotional Life": "Above all is the fact that by many the need of family worship is not felt nor is its value appreciated. The members do not worship because they have no worship to express." It is a sad commentary on the life of a family to say that it has no feelings of adoration, love, and trust toward God to express, or that having such feelings, it can find no time in which to express them. Weigle and Tweedy go on: "The way of escape is apparent. Households can usually find a time for any act which they regard as of vital importance. Ten minutes earlier rising in the morning, ten quiet minutes out of the program for the evening, will furnish the opportunity." The fact of the matter is that in most cases a time can be found. There are, no doubt, families that cannot be brought together in the course of a day,

but they are relatively few. Such families could worship by groups, or gather as families for worship on Sundays or such special days as found them together.

Families usually gather for the morning and evening meals. Before breakfast or after breakfast, before or after the evening meal, are appropriate times for family worship. Professor Sharp will be quoted in the next chapter as thinking that it is fatal to rise from the table, but there are families which find it better to gather in a living room, perhaps the room where the piano or organ stands, where there may be less disorder than in the dining room. After all, with a family will to worship God, the selection of a time and a place for the family worship is a matter which concerns the family convenience, and is subject to no general rules, except that there ought to be a regularity about both time and place.

CHAPTER III

THE USE OF MUSIC IN FAMILY WORSHIP

What is the use of music in worship?

In "Training the Devotional Life," by Weigle and Tweedy, there is a valuable discussion of the function of music in worship which will prepare us for a consideration of its use in family worship: "The thoughtless and flippant attitude taken toward music by many people is amazing. In the home it is an amusement; but they never dream that it may purify the life of the family and vitally affect the characters of the children. In the church it is a pleasure, a means of drawing crowds and of furnishing variety; but that songs are helping to determine men's ethical ideals and spiritual

power never occurs to these people. As to what is sung, and why it is sung, and the results attained, they apparently have no care.

"This is more than incompetence. It is irreverence toward God and a wrong to man. For music is a power. . . . Its highest practical efficiency has been reached as an applied art in the service of religion. For worship and music have always been closely associated. It is a long way from the symbolic dance and rude chant of the savage to the Hallelujah Chorus; but the journey is marked by melody from beginning to end. In those periods when religion has flourished best, men have sung most. Without music worship has seemed imperfect if not impossible.

"Even pure music apart from speech has its gracious ministry. It is full of religious suggestion and inspiration, and one should learn to worship through listening, as Milton did, until it brought all heaven before his sightless eyes. The prelude to public worship, often badly chosen and rarely heeded, is an example. This should help to set the tone and beget the mood of the hour, and so to prepare for the preacher's message. . . .

"But it is when associated with words that music becomes most effective. . . . 'Let me write a people's songs, and whosoever will may write their laws'; said an astute student of human nature centuries ago. To make the hymns of the Church is to shape the faith of the Church. In all ages hymns have been prayers, the spiritual food, the creeds, the weapons of the saints. Missionaries have gone forth as singing evangelists. 'By his songs he has conquered us' cried an angry cardinal as he witnessed the triumphs of Luther. The

Wesleyan Revival needed the hymns of Charles as well as the sermons of John: and there is good reason why the names of Moody and Sankey, of Torrey and Alexander, should have been associated in our own time."

Suggestions for the use of hymns at family worship.

All this can well be applied to the use of hymns at family worship. Whatever is an aid to worship ought to be used as an aid to family worship. Whatever serves to inspire our adoration, love, and trust toward God finds its high use in the family. There are several suggestions that may be made with reference to the use of hymns at family worship.

1. In families where there are young children, children's hymns ought to be sung part of the time. If the children attend Sunday school they may suggest hymns which they have learned at Sunday school; or children's hymns may be selected from the Sunday-school or the Church hymnal. The hymns, as in the case of the Scripture passages for memorizing, should be learned by repetition. It is sometimes profitable to repeat the words without the music until they are learned. But, in general, it is, perhaps better to sing the hymns over and over again until both the words and the music are naturally fixed in the memory. Where the children are very small, one verse or two verses of a hymn will probably be enough for practice at any one worship service. Again, there is an advantage in having a suitable book of children's hymns such as Danielson and Conant, "Songs for Little People," or Thomas, "A First Book in Hymns and Worship," from which selections may be made. The following children's hymns are specially recommended:

“Night and Day”
“Father, we thank thee”
“We plough the fields, and scatter”
“For the beauty of the earth”
“Jesus, tender Shepherd”
“I Think When I Read”
“This Is My Father’s World”
“Now the day is over” (Evening)

All these methods of using children’s hymns may be combined, or better, they may all be used in combination with the methods still to be discussed.

2. The great hymns of the Church should be used at family worship. No matter how young the children are, they ought to be given the opportunity to learn and love the great hymns of the Church which Christians have found to be most suitable vehicles for their aspiring adoration, love, and trust.

Dr. Louis F. Benson has published a little handbook entitled, “The Best Hymns: A Text-Book for Memorizing Them.” In this handbook thirty-two hymns are listed, of which Dr. Benson says: “This book contains only thirty-two hymns, but these are fairly entitled to the distinction of being called the best. They are the hymns that have won the approval of all the great branches of Protestantism speaking the English tongue; the hymns that at the present time are in the widest actual use in all these Churches the world over; the hymns, therefore, that lie closest to the common heart of English-speaking Christians. These, then, are the hymns best worth our learning. And, for that purpose, it is a happy thing rather than otherwise that their number is small. A hymn is not really made our own until it has become as familiar as the thought of the heart, and can sing itself in the darkness without conscious effort of the memory. And it will be a far

greater gain to the spiritual life if time and pains are devoted to mastering the few best hymns, than if a larger number, however good in themselves, were covered by a less perfect and abiding knowledge. Happily the effort needed to master a good hymn is less than is the case with most other forms of literature; because a good hymn is simple in thought, orderly in structure, and rhythmical in language, and the simplicity and orderliness and rhythm are very real aids to the memory. Even were the effort greater than it is, it would be amply justified by the manifold assurance we have of the power, the inspiration, the consolation, of remembered hymns in the heart."

All this is directly applicable to the use of hymns at family worship. Dr. Benson's list follows, and his little book is commended as a textbook for family use in learning these hymns and making them the enduring possession of the members of the family:

1. Rock of Ages, cleft for me
2. When I survey the wondrous cross
3. Jesus, Lover of my soul
4. All praise to thee, my God, this night
5. Jesus, I my cross have taken
6. Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear
7. Awake, my soul, and with the sun
8. Hark! the herald angels sing
9. Abide with me: fast falls the eventide
10. Jerusalem, my happy home
11. How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
12. Nearer, my God, to thee
13. From Greenland's icy mountains
14. Our God, our Help in ages past
15. Jerusalem the golden
16. Lo! He comes, with clouds descending
17. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
18. Glorious things of thee are spoken
19. Hark, the glad sound! the Saviour comes
20. Come, let us join our cheerful songs
21. All hail the power of Jesus' name

22. Hail to the Lord's Anointed
23. O worship the King all-glorious above
24. Christ the Lord is risen today
25. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah
26. Just as I am, without one plea
27. God moves in a mysterious way
28. Jesus, the very thought of thee
29. Children of the heavenly King
30. There is a land of pure delight
31. Thou, whose almighty word
32. Brief life is here our portion

In addition to these best hymns, the family will no doubt desire to sing other good hymns in common use in the services of public worship to which they are accustomed. The Church hymnal, with the Sunday-school hymnal, will be a treasury of such familiar hymns.

3. The hymns used at family worship ought to be carefully explained so that they may be understood and felt and turned into prayer. The method of memorization which has already been suggested should be accompanied by explanations of difficult passages or of allusions in the hymns. In addition it will add to the value of the hymns for worship if occasionally the story of the hymn is read or told to illustrate the spirit out of which it grew. Such books as Dr. Benson's "The Best Hymns: A Text-Book for Memorizing Them," or his "Studies of Familiar Hymns," or "A Treasure of Hymns," by Amos R. Wells, or "History and Use of Hymns and Hymn Tunes," by D. R. Breed, will be most useful.

CHAPTER IV

THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN FAMILY
WORSHIP**Turning the Scripture into prayer.**

Robert M. M'Cheyne, in his "Letter to a Boy," writes: "You read your Bible regularly, of course; but do try to understand it, and still more to feel it. . . . Turn the Bible into prayer." Here is the key to the use of the Bible in worship—it is to be understood; it is to be felt, above all, it is to be turned into prayer in the sense that it is to be made the medium of expressing our adoration, love, and trust toward God.

At family worship passages of Scripture may be either recited from memory or read.

The recitation of Scripture at family worship.

1. The passages may be recited. One of the best ways for securing variety, as well as the participation of the child, is for the father and mother to recite some suitable passage of Scripture. The child will learn it, after hearing it repeated several times, without any strain on his attention. When one passage has been learned, another may be recited until it becomes the child's possession. When a family stock of such passages has been accumulated, the child may sometimes be allowed to choose the passage to be recited. The following passages are suggested for such use:

Gen. 1:1-5
Gen. 1:26-28, 31
Ps. 24:1-4
Ps. 24:7-10

Ps. 19:1-6
Ps. 19:7-10
Ex. 20:1-6
Ex. 20:7-12

Ex. 20:13-17
Ps. 1:1-3
Ps. 1:4-6
Prov. 3:1-6

Deut. 6:4-7	Luke 2:12-14	Matt. 28:1-4
Eccl. 12:1-4, 13, 14	John 1:1-4	Matt. 28:5-7
Ps. 103:1-5	Matt. 5:2-6	Matt. 28:16, 18-20
Ps. 103:10-14	Matt. 5:7-10	Acts 1:7-9
Psalms 23	Matt. 11:28-30	Acts 2:1-4
Ps. 19:11-14	Mark 8:34-37	Rom. 12:1, 2
Ps. 139:1-4, 23, 24	Mark 10:43-45	I Cor. 3:16, 17
Ps. 84:1-3	Mark 12:30, 31	I Cor. 13:1-3
Ps. 84:9-12	John 3:14-16	I Cor. 13:4-8, 13
Isa. 55:1-3	John 14:1-3	Phil. 3:13, 14
Isa. 55:6-8	Luke 23:34, 43	Phil. 4:8
Isa. 55:9-11	John 19:26, 27	II Peter 1:5-7
Isa. 53:3-7	Mark 15:34, 36	Rev. 22:1-4
Isa. 9:6, 7	John 19:30	Rev. 22:14-17
Luke 2:8-11	Luke 23:46	

These passages are listed in "Scripture Memory Work," by Gerrit Verkuyl, which also contains helps for the leader.

Sometimes instead of repeating a whole passage, each member of the family may contribute a verse or verses. In this case the children should be prepared beforehand. The golden texts or other memory verses learned in Sunday school may be emphasized by such repetition.

The reading of Scripture at family worship.

The passages may also be read. If they are read (a) how shall they be selected? (b) who shall read them? (c) how shall they be explained so that they may be understood and felt?

(a) How shall the passages to be read at family worship be selected?

They may be selected from day to day to meet the family needs.

The father of the family in "The Cottar's Saturday Night"

"... wales a portion with judicious care;
And, 'Let us worship God!' he says with solemn air."

After singing a psalm,

“The priest-like father reads the sacred page,
How Abram was the friend of God on high;
Or, Moses bade eternal warfare wage
With Amalek’s ungracious progeny;
Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
Beneath the strokes of Heaven’s avenging ire;
Or Job’s pathetic plaint, and wailing cry;
Or rapt Isaiah’s wild, seraphic fire;
Or other sacred seers that tune the sacred lyre.

Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme,
How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed;
How he, who bore in Heaven the second name,
Had not on earth whereon to lay his head:
How His first followers and servants sped,
The precepts sage they wrote to many a land:
How he, who lone in Patmos banished,
Saw in the sun a mighty angel stand,
And heard great Bab’lon’s doom pronounced by Heaven’s
command.”

If this method is followed the “judicious care” of the “priest-like father” must be emulated. And that judicious care should adapt the passages to both the needs and the capacities of the members of the family.

The passages may be those already selected for the purpose, in various ways.

It used to be a more or less general custom to follow the “Daily Home Readings” selected in connection with the International Uniform Sunday-school Lessons. The rise of various systems of graded Sunday-school lessons robs this practice of its chief value for families which attend a Sunday school in which graded lessons are used.

Many of the religious weeklies regularly publish materials for family worship, including suggested Scripture readings. There are also some monthly magazines devoted to the family altar in which not only

are Scriptural passages suggested, but prayers, devotional comments, and the like are printed.

There is an increasing number of manuals for family worship, some of which list and some of which print Scripture passages covering a limited period of time, together with prayers and other helps. The Presbyterian Book of Family Worship, for example, suggests a psalm and a lesson for the morning and the evening of each day of the year, together with a prayer for each worship service for five weeks, and prayers for special occasions. Dr. J. Wilbur Chapman's "Day After Day" prints a Scripture passage and a prayer for morning worship over a period of thirteen weeks.

Some pastors, either through their church bulletins or through special pamphlets, suggest Scripture readings for family worship in the congregation.

The whole Bible or major portions of it may be read through in course.

There is something to be said for reading the whole Bible through in course. Such reading enriches the experience with the whole of God's Word to man in its unity and variety. In the *Atlantic Monthly* for June, 1920, Dallas Lore Sharp, Professor of English at Boston University had an article on "Education for Individuality," in which he describes the custom of Bible reading at family prayers in his family, as follows:

"We began the reading years ago—none of us can remember when—in a haphazard way (after the training I had had in Sunday school). This was soon changed to a regular, orderly way, which, starting with Genesis, went forward a chapter a day, until, by and by, it came to the end of Revelation. And the next

morning we turned back and started in again with Genesis, which was as fresh as if we had not read it some two or three years before The daily reading was and is the big thing—right along from day to day, dry places, hard places, and bad places, never missing a line—not even the numbering of the tribes, the building of the Tabernacle, the Who-begat-Whom chapters, Ruth and Rahab and the Scarlet Woman; everybody, everything just as it reads, without a quiver, and with endless joy and zest.

“If it is a ‘dry’ place like the building of the Tabernacle, so much the better lesson in patience and concentration; if it is a ‘bad’ place (and there are some horrid spots in the Old Testament), the children had better have it frankly with us, than on the sly, and have it early while their only interest in it is the interest of fact. If it is a ‘hard’ place, as it was this morning in the fifteenth chapter of Joshua, we lick it up, to see who can do the cleanest job of pronunciation, who can best handle his tongue, and make most poetry out of the cities with their villages.

“But there are the beautiful places, the thrilling places—the story, the poetry, the biography, the warning, the exhortation, the revelation, the priest, the prophet, the Great Teacher, the Twelve Disciples, kings and common people, and everywhere the presence of God.”

It may be said that such a practice violated the principles laid down in the previous paragraphs. To this it may be replied that it all depends upon how the reading is done. This is Professor Sharp’s description of the method in his family: “Each of us has his own Bible, and one of the boys is Bible-warden. He puts them on

after breakfast, as the old servant in the Ruskin household put on the dessert. Every morning as soon as breakfast is over, and while we are still at the table (it is fatal to rise), the Bibles are brought in and passed around, and beginning at the head of the table, we read aloud in turn, dividing the chapter by verses equally among us. Seven mornings a week, D. V., we do this, and on Sunday morning, for years, those seven chapters were reviewed, discussed, and illustrated with a series of great Bible pictures." Besides this other books were sometimes studied in the interest of understanding the Biblical passages, and maps were used. Then the family repeated The Lord's Prayer and sang the Doxology. The program of worship was brief. The variety in the Scripture passages furnished variety to the program. It was social: all participated in the reading, the prayer, and the Doxology. Explanations, pictures, and the like interpreted the meaning of the Scripture so that it could be understood and felt.

Dr. Robert Wells Veach, in his "Bible Reading and Religious Training in the Home," outlines a course of reading which will cover the major portion of Scripture in two years. There are many outlines of this kind.

There are also many variations of the method which insures the reading of most of the Scripture at family worship. M'Cheyne in the "Letter to a Boy" already quoted, writes, "Read more parts than one at a time. For example, if you are reading Genesis, read a Psalm also; or if you are reading Matthew, read a small bit of an epistle also." The Presbyterian Book of Family Worship selects a psalm and a lesson for the morning and for the evening of each day of the year, thus preserving the ancient distinction between the psalter and

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Scripture. If family worship is held but once a day, these selections will serve for two years.

(b) Who shall read the passage at family worship?

As a general practice the reading of Scripture at family worship should be social, that is, participated in by all. There may be special occasions when it is most fitting that the head of the family should read the passage, or the reading may now and then be delegated to a child. If the children in the family are too young to read, the method of recitation already described is best. If there are children in a family who cannot read and children who can, the methods of reading and recitation may be alternated or combined in various ways.

Social participation in the reading of the Scripture may be secured by reading in unison, by reading verse about, or by reading verses about. The method of securing the participation does not matter so much as the participation itself.

(c) How shall the passage read at family worship be explained so that it will be understood, felt, and turned into prayer?

Again, it is profitable to recall M'Cheyne's advice to the boy: "But do try to understand it, and still more to feel it Turn the Bible into prayer." When there are children in the family, it is most necessary that the Scripture be so explained and so illustrated that they may understand and feel it and turn it into prayer. There are various ways of doing this. In a family where there are young children the story passages used in family worship may be retold in language which the child can better understand. The gist of other passages

may also be given in language more suited to the child and in closer contact with his own experience. The reading of the passage may be interspersed with comments by the leader which explain words and phrases, or point the teaching with an illustration, or apply the meaning of the passage to a situation within the child's experience.

The method of question and answer may also be used with profit. The children may be encouraged to ask questions about anything in the passage about which they would like further explanation. The head of the family may ask questions which will discover what the children do not understand, and the following explanation will fix in their memories a store of Biblical truth. Of course, the methods just discussed are not mutually exclusive. They may all be employed.

Pictures may also be of great value in making Biblical scenes real and in explaining their meaning. Reproductions of the great religious masterpieces are useful. The prints published by the W. A. Wilde Company, 120 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts, or by the Perry Pictures Company, Malden, Massachusetts, or by George P. Brown and Company, 38 Lovett Street, Beverly, Massachusetts, are inexpensive and very good. Maps may also be used to good effect when the passage is historical. Nothing helps the study of history like a good map.

There are numberless adaptations of these suggested methods for making the Scripture understood and felt. They must all be used with the end in view of turning the Scripture into prayer.

The purpose of worship in the expression of adoration, love, and trust to God must never be lost from sight.

CHAPTER V

THE USE OF PRAYER IN FAMILY WORSHIP

It is perhaps an inexperience in prayer which leads many heads of families to neglect their duty in maintaining family worship. That inexperience can scarcely be overcome by anything but experience. The way to learn how to pray is to pray. The way to learn how to pray out loud and in the company of others is to begin to do it. Is it better for a child to grow up without ever so much as having heard his father's voice in prayer or for him to grow up with indelible and precious memories of a father who, though lisping and stammering, led his child into the mysteries of prayer?

What is prayer?

The Shorter Catechism definition can scarcely be improved on: "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies." There could be no better preparation for the father of a family about to undertake family worship than a study of this definition with the help of the appropriate section in Alexander Whyte's "A Commentary on the Shorter Catechism"; to which should be added an incomparable book on prayer by the same master, "Lord, Teach Us to Pray."

For the present purpose let us seize on the first clause of the definition: "Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God." Dr. Whyte's comment on this clause is as follows: "All prayer presupposes need, and a desire to possess the things needed. Such desire is

altogether indispensable to true prayer. And in many passages of Scripture a true desire is represented as all that is needed to make prayer acceptable and effectual. And on the other hand, where earnest desire is absent, nothing will make up for the want of it. God answers no man's prayer when his heart is not engaged in his supplication."

Not fine words, but true desires make prayer. Is there a father who has earnest desires for his family to offer up unto God? He has the necessary qualification to lead in family prayer. Is there a father who has the use of fine words but no true desires on behalf of his family? He has no qualification to lead his family in prayer. Lack of experience in praying out loud is no real hindrance to leading family prayer; lack of experience in true and holy desires for the family is a fatal barrier.

Suggestions for family prayer.

There are some suggestions about family prayer which grow out of the nature of prayer and the nature of the family.

1. Prayer in the family must be sincere. Sincerity is necessary to true prayer of every kind, whether secret or social. Jonathan Edwards wrote in his diary, "It is best to be careful in prayer not to put up those petitions of which I do not feel a true desire; for thereby my prayer is rendered less sincere, less acceptable to God, and less useful to myself." The same could be said with double emphasis about prayer in the family.

2. Prayer in the family must be reverent. This may be said of all prayer, as well as of all worship. It is of the very nature of our adoration, love, and trust toward

God that it should be reverent. Of reverence in family prayer, Dr. Whyte says in his "Lord, Teach Us to Pray": "But even when family worship is never—morning or night—pushed into a corner, it might almost better be. The regulation chapter; the wooden monotony; the mechanical round; the absence of a thought, or an idea, or an emotion, or a feeling; one pushing about a creaking chair when he is on his knees: another yawning until the whole room is ashamed of the indecency: another coughing and sneezing without ceremony: and then—before Amen is well uttered—all the room beginning to talk at once: it had been bottled up for the past ten minutes. I only know one house, in all my acquaintance, where ordinary decorum is taught to the children and the guests in the matter of a moment of reverential silence before the babel begins again after prayer to God."

3. Prayer in the family ought to be brief. This is particularly true where there are young children in the family. It is enough to remember that we are thinking of family prayer, that is, prayer in which all the members of the family may participate. A few sentences, if fitly chosen, will suffice. "And in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

4. Prayer in the family ought to be social; that is, it ought to be adapted to the needs and capacities of the members of the family. For the sake of the little children, the older members of the family must turn and become as little children in prayer. This means that when there are children in the family the prayer ought not only to be simple but also to arise out of the living experience of the children; it ought to express their

aspirations. Of course, family prayer ought to be such that the actual religious experience of the children will be not only expressed but also enlarged and enriched.

Here is the natural place to discuss the question, who should lead in family prayer? The head of the family is the natural leader of the family in prayer. But he ought to prepare himself for his leadership not only so that he shall be in the mood and spirit of prayer but also so that he can interpret the true desires of every member of his family to God. But beyond this, it is desirable that the children should be given the privilege on occasion, of leading the family prayer. This may be done by assigning the privilege in advance to this or that child. Or it may be done by substituting now and then brief prayers by each member of the family for the one family prayer. In any case, the social element may be introduced by the family's repeating in unison, at the conclusion of the special prayer, some form of prayer, such as The Lord's Prayer or any other that may seem suitable.

Another question that may properly be discussed here is the relative merit of extempore prayer and forms of prayer. There is much to be said for the use of forms of prayer which have commended themselves, like the great hymns, to the Christian consciousness. Something may also be said for the use of forms of prayer such as are widely available in the manuals for family worship. How much can be said for these forms depends on the forms themselves. At the best, there is a gain in the use of forms of prayer where those forms have an orderliness, a richness, and a dignity which is beyond most of us in voluntary prayer. At the worst,

there is a loss of spontaneity, of sincerity, of reality. In addition, most current forms are ill adapted to the expression of the spiritual desires of children. The best forms of prayer may well serve as models for family prayer. Their occasional use will influence the extempore prayers in the direction of orderliness, richness, and dignity. Their constant use is likely to steal away the spirit of prayer which is true desire offered up to God.

It is true that no family prayer ought to be extempore in the sense that there has been no preparation for it. Being the highest expression of family life, family prayer ought to spring out of a rich preparation of the mind and heart of the leader. That preparation might well take the form of a written prayer, written down by the leader in preparation for his appearance with the family at God's throne. In families where the only reason for the use of forms of prayer is the inexperience of the family in prayer, those forms may be discarded, or used only on occasion, after an experience of prayer has been gained through their use, as a lame man discards a crutch when he has learned to walk without it.

It is possible, of course, to combine the use of extempore prayer with the use of forms as is suggested in the discussion of the social nature of family prayer.

5. Family prayer ought to turn the Scripture and the hymn of family worship toward God. The aspirations which have been aroused by the hymn and the Scripture ought to find explicit expression in the family prayer. In his comment of the phrase "for things agreeable to his will" in the Shorter Catechism definition of prayer, Dr. Whyte quotes Edward Irving as saying: "The first step toward prayer, therefore, is the knowl-

edge of the promises of God, which are, as it were, the charter to go by." In the family prayer the leader may well plead the promises of God discovered in the Scripture or unfolded by the hymn.

6. Family prayer ought to be varied. It is impossible to go the whole round of prayer in ten minutes or in ten hours. But it would be a sad loss if family prayer stuck fast in a rut and never made the round. The leader must study the elements of prayer and enrich the life of the family with them in season. Now one element and now another will predominate and give the tone to the family prayer. But every element ought to find its place and add its glory to the family worship. There are several generally recognized elements in complete and orderly prayer. These are: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, and submission.

(a) Adoration. The psalmist writes, "I have set Jehovah always before me." The purpose of adoration in prayer is to set the Lord before us, to begin our prayer with an adoration of the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for what he is. The Lord's Prayer opens with adoration, "Our Father which art in heaven." When we call God our Father in heaven, and contemplate him as our Father in heaven we adore him, setting him before us in all the glory of his heavenly fatherhood.

Dr. Alexander Whyte, in the thirteenth sermon of his "Lord, Teach Us to Pray," writes: "Petition is the lowest, the most rudimentary and the most elementary of all kinds of prayer. And it is because we so seldom rise above the rudiments and first principles of divine things that we so seldom think and so seldom speak,

about prayer in any other sense than that of request and petition and supplication. Whereas praise—pure, emancipated, enraptured, adoring praise—is the supremest and most perfect of all kinds of prayer. Thanksgiving is higher and purer than petition; while, again, it is lower and less blessed than holy, heavenly, God-adoring praise.”

(b) Confession. Confession naturally follows on adoration. When we set the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ before us, we inevitably have a new sense of our own sinfulness. Dr. Whyte says in his commentary on the Shorter Catechism phrase, “with confession of our sins”: “It is impossible that a sinner should truly draw near to God in the name of Christ without such a sense of his corruption and guilt being awakened within him as to make him introduce and intersperse his prayer with confession of sin and lamentation on account of it. Let the student pass his mind over the record of Scripture, and mark how universal and how acceptable this state of mind was in God’s people. There is nothing more becoming sinful men than confession and contrition.”

(c) Thanksgiving. As confession inevitably follows adoration, so thanksgiving in the Christian inevitably follows confession. We draw near to God in adoring praise. We are struck with our own corruption and guilt. We are raised up and revived again with a sense of all God’s goodness and mercy to us, in his providence and most of all in his redeeming grace. This sense of God’s goodness and grace is expressed in thanksgivings. “In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

“The virtues were invited once
To banquet with the Lord of All;
They came—the great ones rather grim,
And not so pleasant as the small.

“They talked and chatted o’er the meal,
They even laughed with temp’rate glee;
And each one knew the other well,
And all were good as good could be.

“Benevolence and Gratitude
Alone of all seemed strangers yet;
They stared when they were introduced—
On earth they never once had met.”

(*d*) *Petition.* A thankful acknowledgment of God’s mercies encourages us to ask for new mercies. In our petitions let us recall the Shorter Catechism phrase, “for things agreeable to his will.” On this phrase Dr. Whyte commented: “We ought to ask nothing in prayer that we know not to be agreeable to the will of God, and we ought to use every endeavor to find out what is agreeable to his will; for assuredly, neither by prayer, or by any other effort of ours, shall we get anything which is not so agreeable. Before we pray, we must, so far as we can, learn his will about the things we desire, and restrain or put forward our prayer accordingly. And we have God’s will revealed so as to be our guide in prayer as in all other matters of faith and duty.”

(*e*) *Intercession.* Intercession is a form of petition, but it is well to mention it separately since of all forms of petition it is the most neglected and the most fruitful. It is true that in the nature of the case, much intercession, being about intimate and personal matters, must be private and “in secret,” but there is much intercession which is appropriate in the family. In the family intercession the whole mission and service of the

Church of Christ in the world may not only be commended to God but also laid up against the heart of the child. Some families confess the advantage of using some such guidance in intercessory prayer for the world-wide work of the Church as the "Year Book of Prayer for Missions," issued annually by the Woman's Board of Home Missions and the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

(f) Submission. Our Lord's example must be imitated in all our prayers: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

(g) In the name of Christ. This is a distinctive feature of all Christian prayer that is offered "in the name of Christ," or for Christ's sake. "In the name of Christ" is more than a formula with which it is customary to conclude a prayer. Christian prayers may well conclude with more than a "bare mentioning of his name." The significance of the phrase is well unfolded in question and answer number 180 of the Larger Catechism: "What is it to pray in the name of Christ?" "To pray in the name of Christ, is, in obedience to his command, and in confidence on his promises, to ask mercy for his sake: not by bare mentioning of his name; but by drawing our encouragement to pray, and our boldness, strength, and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and his mediation." "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do."



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